The Columbia River
Improving Water Quality

Idaho DEQ, Oregon DEQ, Washington Dept. of Ecology, and US EPA Region 10
in coordination with the Columbia Basin Tribes
Joint Fact Sheet #3 Fall 2001

Columbia/Snake River Mainstem Temperature TMDL

What is a TMDL?

Federal law requires states to identify sources of pollution (which includes temperature) in waters that do not meet water quality standards (WQS). States must determine how much pollution the waters can receive and *still* meet WQS – (also called a total maximum daily load or a TMDL). A TMDL defines the maximum allowed pollution for the water body and allocates pollutant "loads" among the sources.

The Columbia River basin covers a huge geographic region, reaching over 1500 miles from the Pacific Ocean on the Washington/Oregon coast to the mountains of British Columbia, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Great diversity is present not only in land forms but also in culture, politics and economy. The Columbia/Snake River system harbors threatened and endangered salmon populations and also hosts the most extensive system of hydroelectric power generation in the nation.

Water quality studies have found that temperature levels in the Columbia River exceed the water quality standards established by Washington, Oregon, the Colville Confederated Tribes and the Spokane Tribe of Indians.

Why is temperature a problem?

Water temperature is a vital factor influencing the health and survival of our native fishes. By acting differently upon the physiology of all species present in a stream, temperature contributes greatly to determining the structure of the entire aquatic community. Temperature affects embryonic development, juvenile growth, adult migration, competition with non-indigenous species, and influences the relative risk and severity of disease. Increased temperature can reduce quality of habitat for fish. The regions fish populations have declined significantly, and the habitat – the lakes and rivers where the fish live – needs to be healthy for the fish populations to recover. Habitat is one of many factors causing the decline in salmon and steelhead populations.

Roles and Responsibilities

An inter-agency steering committee consisting of staff from the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, the Washington Department of Ecology and the EPA has been formed to develop the Temperature TMDLs. A number of Columbia Basin Tribes also participate on the committee. EPA will issue the temperature TMDLs for all waters in Washington, Oregon and within Indian Reservations. Idaho will issue the temperature TMDL for reaches in its jurisdiction.

Columbia/Snake River Mainstem Temperature TMDL

The geographic scope of the Columbia/Snake River Mainstem Temperature TMDL includes the Mainstem

Snake River from its confluence with the Salmon River to its confluence with the Columbia River, and the Mainstem of the Columbia River, from the Canadian Border to the Pacific Ocean. The Temperature TMDL is scheduled to be completed by December of 2002, and will proceed according to the following timeline:

- Public Workshop on Water Quality Modeling – July 2001
- Public Workshop on Temperature Problem Assessment – October 29 & 30, 2001
- Develop Loading Capacity and Allocations for Public Review and Comment – Winter 2001
- Public Workshop on Loading Capacity and Allocations – Winter 2001 or WInter 2002
- Draft Temperature TMDL for Public Review and Comment – Summer 2002
- Public Meeting on Draft Temperature TMDL – Summer 2002
- Final Temperature TMDL issued – December 2002

For Notes/Workshop Materials or for More Information

Log onto the Internet at
Http://www.epa.gov/r10earth/columbiamainstemtmdl.htm

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